



IMPACT OF THE IMPROVED MEANS OF COMMUNICATION ON THE MANUFACTURING URBAN CENTRES OF THE 19TH CENTURY U.P.

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INTRODUCTION

Sir John Stratchey noted in 1844 that roads and bridges hardly existed in India and railways were not thought of.¹ Despite well developed trade relations² except for a few famous imperial highways, communications in pre-British India were poor, even when judged with the low standards of the day in other countries. Roads were in most cases only passable during the dry season, especially condition of commercial roads were poor. Even in 1800, there were no metalled roads in the Banaras district.³ In Oct, 1788, Jonathan Duncan (the then British Resident at Banaras) reported that the roads, even in the vicinity of the city were in an impassable state due to their non-repair.⁴ In 1824 Bishop Heber complained of the bad roads in the Upper Province (of which the capital was Agra)- "The fact is there are no roads at all and the tracks which we follow are often such as to require care even no back here and there is a tolerable level, a mile and two, with a few exceptions. There is no fast or pleasant driving in this part of India".⁵

Throughout 18th century, as a result of the decline and the break up of the central authority, roads were utterly neglected. Moreover due to the absence of the department to look after constructions and repairs such as the Public Works Department before British arrival, roads were not well preserved.

Prior to the advent of railways, the two navigable rivers, the Ganga and the Yamuna were the main channels of transportation. 'The Ganga was the main highway of most of the trade of this region'.⁶ Towns Specifically like Banaras, Lucknow, Agra, Allahabad, Kanpur and others, on account of being situated on the banks of the Ganga and its main tributaries- the Yamuna, Gomati and the Ramganga- have benefited greatly by riverine trade. Amidst the absence of larger improved means of communication like railways, bridges, steam navigations etc. (for example traditional boats were the medium of conveyance as steam boats were not introduced till the first quarter of the 19th century) their connectivity with the important trade centre's of India through water traffic, so vital during 18th century, have facilitated poignantly their emergence as the commercial trading marts and centre's of manufacturing industries during 18th century. 'More than six hundred commercial establishment began functioning on both the banks of the rivers from Allahabad to Banaras due to well developed riverine traffic'.⁷

Traditional boats were the medium of conveyance as steam boats were not introduced till the first quarter of the 19th century. Before the middle of 19th century, however, the

great development in communication in England had fired the imagination of the Company servants and led to the great era of construction of roads, railways, bridges and canals in India. The transformation in attitude was mainly borne out of economic interest. So long as the British involvement was limited to the import of quantities of handicraft products and a few traditional semi-processed agro-industrial products, there was no need to invest in an infrastructure for opening up to the country with roads and railways. The latter type of investment became worth while only when the pattern of import-export began to change with an increasingly large volume of manufactures import and raw material export.⁸ The motivation for constructing roads, railways and steam boats for navigation was initially grabbed for military purpose. Till the early 1850s there was no development of public work outside the army.⁹ The real work of road and railway building on the part of government began with the establishment of a public works department under Lord Dalhousie. During his administration Grand Trunk Road from Calcutta to Banaras was extended to Delhi.

(II)

Following the improvement and construction of roads¹⁰, railways¹¹, bridges¹² and steam navigation¹³ especially in the latter half of 19th century, towns were now better articulated not only with its hinterland and neighboring districts but also with the other commercially important trade cities like Bombay, Delhi, Calcutta and others.

Improved communication revolutionized the life of the towns and introduced the dynamics in the inflow and outflow of the traffic and trade of the towns. For example, in Kanpur with added facility of transport, trade and industry both enhanced in the city taking surprise stride.¹⁴ During the 1870s and 1880s the broad and medium gauge traversed every district of United Province and by 1900, even the most remote areas of the Province were connected with Calcutta, Delhi, Bombay and the Punjab and Western India.

With the improved communication, goods could be transported from one place to another distant places with less cost and time. According to Buchanan's writings- 'in the first decade of 19th century the state of roads allowed passing of goods at a rate of 12 miles per day at most'.¹⁵ But, since the establishment of roads and railways and steams, goods could be passed with much faster speed. "The passenger boat the 'William Bentinck' was launched in Calcutta in April 1834. Against three to four month it took 27 days to reach Allahabad from Calcutta despite adverse weather, and the voyage to and fro took 38 days".¹⁶

Due to improved land and sea communication, import and export of the towns increased. For example, owing to Railways, Kanpur developed as a great trading mart.¹⁷ “The total amount of rail borne imports in Agra District in 1881 was 32,77,000 maunds worth Rs. 16,66,8000 while twenty year later it was 46,09,000 maunds valued at Rs. 2,09,33,000, Export had similarly increased from 16,88,000 maund worth Rs. 1,37,23,000 in 1881, the total has risen to 39,06,000 maunds worth Rs. 1,83,73,000 in 1901”.¹⁸

On the one side improved communication; specially railway establishment, speeded and encouraged trade and commerce of North-West Province and began the commercial and industrial revolution; on the other side it brought destruction to artisan and allied crafts industry, specially cotton textile industry of the towns. The influx of cheap British and Non-British machine made goods into India was the primary cause of the decline of cottage industries of the towns. Specially railways made it easy for foreign articles to reach the towns and interior areas. Through land and sea, the enhanced imports of British goods and their distribution reached to the towns in a large quantity or volumes. Foreign (mostly British) articles, which could be bought cheaply, began to come speedily into the market. Nor could the local industries stop the flow of raw materials to England which starved their own industries. Oil seeds were exported from Allahabad district to England.¹⁹ In similar way, European imports or goods manufactured by local European concerns in Kanpur had pre-empted the only mass market in which north Indians might have competed on a large scale.²⁰ Forty percent of the population of several district of UP were being supplied imported cloth in the 1870s.²¹ Railways were primarily taken to meet the raw material and market requirements of the British industry. Not only did Railways export raw materials from interiors to towns, but also flooded the native with cheap foreign goods. Cotton and other material goods were exported from Britain and distributed to various towns of upper province with the help of railways and steam boats. Goods produced by the cottage industry, being more costlier than their foreign counterparts, found no market at all, so much so that their production tended to decline. In Banaras, under the British railway brought in factory goods and the cottage industry faced great competition and even extinction.²² Making of combs of wood in Allahabad which is said to have been very prosperous enterprise in the Mughal period, suffered great competition from imported combs in the British times.²³ Industrial Units of towns began to decline as more and more foreign (mostly British) articles which could be bought cheaply, began to come into the market. Gradually the industrial units of Allahabad district began to close down as the introduction of railways in 1865 and its development made speedy arrival of foreign goods in trade and industry and strike a death blow to indigenous manufacturers.²⁴

Whereas, on the other side, the establishment of railways in latter half of the 19th century created a condition for the growth of modern industries by providing necessary transport facilities for raw materials, industrial labor machinery and finished goods. Railway follows the principle of charging what the traffic will bear. ‘It is no secret that no other mode of transport

except our vast network of railways could effectively undertake this difficult task. They have made an important contribution towards the development of the iron and steel industries by quoting suitably low special rates, concessional rates are also extended to the raw material and finished products of cement, chemical, glass, sugar and paper industries’.²⁵ Of the towns Kanpur’s development as an industrial town in the latter half of the 19th century was mainly borne out of railways’ establishment. Before 1857 Kanpur had been a cotton and indigo bulk city in the same class as Mirzapur, Farrukabad and Allahabad. By the end of the last quarter of the 19th century most of the important centres of the country and all the important centres of the region were fully connected with Kanpur by main lines or branch lines of different groups of railways. ‘Kanpur availed the maximum benefit as it got the opportunity of having railway centre firstly in this region’.²⁶

The growth of faster and cheaper transportation by railways provided a fresh impetus for the industrial expansion of Kanpur as goods and raw materials began to move swiftly, easily and safely in comparison to water transport of river Ganga. Cotton growing areas of Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Gujrat and Western Uttar Pradesh, supplied ample quantities of cotton to industries at Kanpur. “In 1876-77, the total imports of cotton to Kanpur amounted to 36210 quintals from the surrounded district of U.P and 32000 to 40,000 quintals from out of the state”.²⁷ Cotton from Bundelkhand which had been previously bulked at kalpi or Allahabad now brought direct to Kanpur.²⁸

Due to Railways Kanpur developed as a great trading mart. Raw cotton, yarn, piece goods, sugar and oil seeds, grain, hide and skin constituted the main item of export. The traffic of raw material and finished products raised by the railways to such a high rate shows the sign of the waxy phase of the city industry²⁹ thus the East India Railway provided an impetus to trade and commerce, a great volume of trade passing through the district was nearly as 569.5 Lakhs. The export consisting of cotton, food- stuffs, dyes spices and leather were valued at Rs. 34 Lakhs. By 1877, the city became a great collecting at distributing centre for northern India. Cloth and Cotton were sent to this from the Doab and Bundelkhand. Oil seeds and indigo seed were exported Calcutta and other places of Bengal.³⁰

Kanpur now became a distribution point for incoming goods and a bulk for Cotton, Indigo etc. In 1891 import by railways amounted to 2.92 quintals, whereas in 1900 the import by railways rose to 3.52 million and export to as much as 3.6 million quintals.³¹ Kanpur became the centre of exchange for northern India. It outdid the famous markets of Mirzapur and Farrukabad.

With the well endowed export- import facilities in Kanpur, it attracts traders, merchants and investors to congregate there which resulted in increased investment in industries. Fair railway charges encouraged buyers and brokers to congregate at a few favored cities and especially in Kanpur, Faizabad and Delhi.³²

On account of steam and railway facilities, European presence

was strongly felt, who were largely investing on commodity trade. More than 80 percent of the firms in Kanpur in 1870s called themselves traders of country goods, commission agents and country produce Brokers.³³ During the latter half of 19th century most of the investment in industries in Kanpur was made by Europeans. In the narrow sense industrialization took place in the second half of the 19th century in Kanpur where by virtue of military demands and increased infrastructure facility (Steam boats, Railways and Roads) and security; Leather, Cotton and various other industries were established by the end of 19th century: (i) The first important industry was related to the tanning and currying of leather and the articles made from these. In 1867, a big factory known as the Government Harnesses and saddlery Factory was established.³⁴ (ii) For cloth production, in 1862, the Elgin Cotton Spinning and Weaving Company Ltd was established.³⁵ Many other cotton mills like The Muir Mills Company Ltd. In 1874,³⁶ The Cawnpore Cotton Mills Company Ltd in 1882,³⁷ The Victoria Mills Company Ltd. In 1885³⁸ were also established (iii) In 1876, the Cawnpore Woolen Mills and Army Cloth Manufacturing Company Ltd. were started. These produced all sorts of woolen fabric.³⁹ Along with textile companies, leather and agro based industries and an engineering Company too were started in the second half of the 19th century in Kanpur. Thus Kanpur emerged as a great industrial centre chiefly on account of the Railway development.

With the advent of railways Agra and Allahabad too had registered growth in trade and modern industries. In Agra in the last quarter of 19th century Messrs. A. John and Co. related with cotton production was established,⁴⁰ besides several other grinning and pressing factories also found take birth at Agra.

Despite increased trade of Lucknow⁴¹ however it was not benefited as much as Kanpur for the railway was introduced to Kanpur much earlier. Kanpur gained a lead on Lucknow in grain and hide trade of Oudh merely because the railway to Kanpur was built earlier. As for Banaras, its importance as an industrial and trade centre declined in comparison to Kanpur. Railway established direct links between Calcutta and Lucknow via Kanpur against the precedent trade route between Lucknow and Calcutta via Banaras. Now goods directly imported or exported to Kanpur instead of Banaras. As a result trade of Banaras suffered. 'The present cheapest and most direct route between Lucknow and Calcutta is via Kanpur. Hence Lucknow retailers of imported goods, cloths and iron, for instance, and the retailers from all places beyond Lucknow depended on the Kanpur market for bulk purchases. The more direct route between Calcutta and Lucknow is via Banaras, but the break in railway communication at the Ganges in the last named place operate to prevent the adoption of this line'.⁴²

Thus Railway encouraged growth of market which developed along the Railway lines. Trade flourished as traders now, being free from local cesses and control, tend to reach freely to the new established free bazaars. 'One of the conditions of the success had been the emancipation from the system of local cesses imposed by the landed proprietary when railway began to create their own free bazaars'.⁴³ The trademark or famous

market centres in preceding period, after the coming into existence of railways, now faced death as they were situated far away from the railway routes. For example, before the establishment of the British rule, Mirzapur and Fatehgarh were the important trade marts of Oudh. Due to the establishment of the British rule and opening of new routes and means of transportation these centres got ruined. In their place sprung up marts like Kanpur and Agra.⁴⁴ Kanpur emerged as the great regional money market and Manufacturing center of northern India, closely tied at one end to Calcutta and at the other to Bombay⁴⁵ whereas importance of Banaras, Allahabad and Lucknow as the trade and manufacturing centres faced further decline by the end of 19th century.

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